

March 3, 2021 - TESTIMONY FOR EDUCATION COMMITTEE HEARING

- IN SUPPORT SB 949
- AGAINST SB 948
- Need Clarification for SB 886 - request clarification on the Special Ed component of the expansion of Open Choice program

*Dear Chairmen Sanchez and McCrory, Ranking Members McCarty and Berthel and esteemed members of the Committee, I am Janet Cling of Darien.*

*I am testifying today in support of Bill SB 949. I feel this is one of the most sensible bills for education reform as it attempts to fix a long history of poor financial management in our State's education system. Every legislator as well as the common man without special interest would agree double dipping is not smart nor ethical. I understand the argument against the Money Follow The Child model because it allows students to go outside of failing districts to seek a better education. With the most motivated and capable students / parents gone, the district is left with students with even less upward mobility. However, the current scenario is that 100% of the students are failing in these districts. If you allow a percentage of them to leave with proper funding, they will have the potential of maximizing their achievement goals. Public schools of Choice are the highest performing schools in CT with the least amount of funding so we know it's not about the money. These schools have clearly done more with less, so why are they being punished while we figure out how to solve the hard problem of improving education for the remainder of the kids. If we would be willing to expand choice schools locally in those districts and actually allow Money to Follow the Child, then how many of those kids would still be left in those districts? Some may not be able to commute an hour to choice schools or participate in the Open Choice pilot program in the Governor's Budget bill.*

*I think it's always good to look at our neighboring states to see what they're doing on similar issues and NYC, with the nation's largest school districts and millions of children, has Money Following The Child in place right now. CT only has half a million kids. This seems quite standard throughout the country and for the rest of the country, there are 28 states currently with this same bill going through the state legislation.*

*I am also testifying against SB 948 which I believe does more harm than good than even keeping the status quo. The specific language on lines 307-311 and Lines 1095-1098 legislates double funding of ECS education costs to cities and explicitly states that school districts will continue to be paid for 42,000 kids in CT who are NOT enrolled in those district schools.*

*Of course I understand there is fixed infrastructure cost associated with running a district but if we are being honest about how the funding is currently allocated, it's to keep union teachers employed when they're not actually teaching full-time. Most of these union teachers are themselves middle-class suburbanites and don't even live in the communities they "work" or send their own kids there. At best, the wastefulness is criminal. At worst, this is what institutional racism looks like, because it surely isn't for equity that these union teachers are kept gainfully employed when only 4% of them are teachers of color.*

*I implore the Committee to please vote with your conscience and vote YES on SB 949 and NO on SB 948 to stop the bigotry of low expectations for Black and Brown children.*

*I also wanted to request clarification on the Special Ed component of the expansion of Open Choice program in bill SB 886. I'm personally very happy to hear about the expansion of this pilot program but again why is only \$3000-\$8000 following the child to a receiving district? For a non Special Ed child, that may be fine depending on how much ECS funding per child Norwalk / Danbury would even get. Just for the record, in Darien, it's about \$22,000 to educate a regular child, but when it comes to Special Ed children, the cost could go up significantly. The language was very vague around Special Ed and I urge*

*the Committee to please clarify the mechanism to reimburse receiving districts for it before voting yes for this Budget Bill.*

*Thank you for listening to my testimony.*

*Janet Cling,  
Darien*